

“What we need is more *Mozares* and *Betovenes*”: cultural transfer, music reception and the conflictive cosmopolitanism of early nineteenth-century Latin American composers

The writing of music in European “learned” styles in Latin America during the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries has been traditionally perceived by scholars as “neutral”, a direct peripheral extension of assumed “universal” parameters, given its lack of exotic or nationalistic features. However, using mostly archival sources, my research -and this paper- explores how, on the contrary, the writing of sonatas, symphonies and other similar genres by Latin American composers on that period was perceived as a very specific way of music-making, where notions of the local, the cosmopolitan and transatlantic intersect in difficult terms. Music from this period, which I situate between Bourbon reforms in the 1770s and the end of independence wars by the 1830s, was closely tied to the undergoing revolutions and contemporary notions of the limits of western culture in the nascent public sphere of which “philharmonic concerts” took part. For example, while for some composers – like Pedro Ximénez Abrill in Peru (1784–1856) –, the writing of certain specific instrumental forms – like symphonies – was closely related to their own feeling of being part of a broader European culture, for others – like Mariano Elízaga in Mexico (1786–1842) – it represented a way to break with the colonial-Spanish past and its own aesthetics. For others, it represented a way to escape a life of writing music exclusively for the church and creating a public secular way of music listening and writing, as it happened to Juan Meserón (1779–1845) in Caracas. In their music and discourses, the contradictory ways in which the “classical style” and the nascent romantic ideals were appropriated across Latin America, show how the perceived cosmopolitan appeal of such musics was confronted with such a different political, social and cultural sphere as the one transforming itself across the Atlantic.

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